

Walter Francis
El Centro Reception Center,
February 18, 1958

The processing system runs as follows: it all begins with a grower who takes a look at his crop and figures he is going to need, say, 200 men to help him harvest it. He tells the nearest Farm Labor office that he will need 200 men on such and such a date. He can't ask specifically for Nationals. He just asks for help. The Farm Labor office estimates how many of those 200 jobs it can fill with locals, and sends the information to Sacramento. There, the people in charge of the statewide Farm Labor service look it over, and may want to make a few changes on the basis of knowledge they may have which the local office didn't have. Then, the state chief, Mr. Hayes, signs a certification that so many Nationals are going to be needed by such and such a grower at such and such a date. He sends a copy down to us, and we're in business. Used to be that they sent the certification to Washington for final approval by the Department of Labor. But they figured they'd save time the new way. (As it turned out, it doesn't save much.) All we need is Hayes' signature. I guess they figured every state should have the final say as to how many foreigners it wanted coming in.

~~Well, we send a copy of the request down to our representative in Empalme. He tells the Mexican authorities who run what they call a Migratory Station. The day before~~

Okay. Things ride along until the grower's crop starts to be just about ready. He telephones us, usually about ten days before he is actually going to start picking his crop. He says he'll be down to pick up, say 150 braceros, on a certain date. We already have on record that he has been certified for 200. He can order any number up to 200. We get busy and phone our representative in Empalme. He tells the Mexican authorities who run what they call a Migratory Station. The day before we want the men here, they pick out 150 men from the bunch who are waiting around Empalme. The Mexicans check their army status, and give them a medical exam, which is paid for by the Public Health Service. Then, they come over to ~~xxxx~~ the side of the street run by the Department of Labor, and they get a screening by the Immigration Service, and an interview to weed out the taxi drivers and brick layers. If they pass all these, they are given what is called a provisional entry card. At seven o'clock every night a train pulls out of Empalme with braceros. It is switched to another engine at Hermosillo. It's due to arrive in Mexicali every morning at 10:00, but is sometimes late.

The men are checked by customs and the department of agriculture at the border, and they are dusted with lindane, along with their clothes and baggage. Then they step across the border, and are taken in busses which we charter, from there to here.

Marvin Richmond,
Assistant Camp Manager,
El Centro Reception Center,
Feb. 18, 1958

I used to be manager of the Migratory Station at Irapuato. I've seen the boys going in and out, both sides of the line, for a good many years now. You don't have to look hard to see the changed that this program is making as far as external things are concerned. You could take a census of the pedal-operated sewing machines they take back with them. You could see how many of them wear American made shoes, clothes, etc. It would be almost all of them.

But the things inside their minds is what you're most interested in, and that's what's hard to prove. I can give you some ideas, though. I used to sit there at a desk in Irapuato, interviewing the men to see if they were bona fide farm laborers. I could tell in practically every case whether a man had been to the U.S. before or not. How? By his self-confidence. The ones coming in for the first time were so shy and timid they could hardly answer when you asked them their name. They tied up completely. The ones who had been through the mill even once were more sure of themselves. When you asked them questions, they would sing right out.

You ask how many are repeaters. All depends. Right now is a slack season. They are able to pick and choose pretty carefully down at the Migratory Stations. In today's consignment -- well, you can see for yourself, it looks like about 90% have been here before. In the height of the season, when we process nearly 35,000 men a month here, you'll find maybe 50%, maybe even more, have never been to the U.S. before.

The INS keeps this kind of information because it helps them with their paper work. A man who has been here before, you don't have to ask him all the same questions over again.

Mr. Shafer

There may be a few men claiming they are coming in for the first time who have really been here before -- giving false names, etc. They are the ones who got in Dutch, skipped their contracts or something like that. The percentage is very small. And they usually don't get away with it for long. We always take their fingerprints, and can find out if they are lying or not.

The first thing they get when they step off the bus is a chest x-ray, because it takes about 4½ hours to develop the film and read it, which is as long as all the rest of the processing takes. Then they get a blood test for syphilis. We're pioneering in this, and it is the talk of all the medical journals. They also get an examination for obvious sickness and things which may have been missed in the screening in Mexico. Then they get another security check. The Immigration Service up here has a more up-to-the-minute list of undesirables than the one at Empalme. Then the men are ready to meet their employer for the first time. They go into a shed, and they all sit down, in rows of chairs. The employer -- or employer's representative -- stands at the front of the room. The contract is ready, in Spanish. Then the men pass in front of the employer, one row at a time. Those who want to work for him, and who he wants to hire, go over to one side of the room. The ones he doesn't like the look of, or who don't like his looks, go over to the other.

If a guy has been around here four or five days and hasn't latched onto a contract, we figure he's just a free-loader, and we ship him back.

Those who end up on the right side of the room are taken over to a long annex we've built, where there's a whole row of girls with typewriters. They fill in the individual contracts, which the men are supposed to sign along with the consul, the employer, and myself. Actually, the three of us couldn't begin to keep up with them all, so we just sign a stencil.

Then, for the last step, the men stop by the Immigration Service office again and receive a form I-100, which is their passport. It has their picture on it, and the place they are going to work, and the dates they've been contracted for. If their contract is extended, that is stamped on the form. This form is all the Border Patrol can go on in separating the bracero from the illegals.

Then, the group of 150 goes out and sits under one of our trees and waits for a bus. The busses are chartered by the employers. We have nothing to do with that. On busy days we have about thirty of them lined up out there, waiting.

I forgot to say, we are required to drop everything at noon and give everybody a hot lunch. This takes some doing, and raises hell with the processing lines, but we do the best we can. We're set up to feed 12,000 men an hour. We can also put up men overnight if we have to. We have 2,000 (?) folding cots we can use. Many times the time I've left here at 5:00 in the afternoon, with everybody processed out, and got back here at 8:00 in the morning, and found 15,000 men in camp. They arrive all during the night, you see, on the way back to Mexico. There's no way we can control that.

"Specials" - reluctant to discuss
"Mica"

Processing on way ~~at~~ back to Mexico
addresses men as "amigos"
Insightful observations re Arizona.

Dr. McGhee,
El Centro Reception Center,
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When we are going full blast around here, we handle 2,500 men per day. We've gone as high as 2,800. Under those conditions, I have about 10 or 11 assistants, and maybe 1 doctor to help read x-rays if I'm lucky. Right now, when we handle maybe 500 men a day I have 6 assistants. I think we do a pretty darn good job

The screening in Mexico is largely concerned with seeing that only men qualified to do hard labor get through. They listen to the heart, watch for hernia, bad eyes, etc. Up here we are primarily concerned with communicable disease. That's the Public Health Service's job, isn't it? We do what we can with our funds. A doctor was asking me just a few days ago, "Why don't you test for diabetes?" That's very important as to whether a man can do a hard day's work or not." I said, "We wouldn't mind, but where's the money?" It's not just a matter of the lab work, but the clerical work. It would mean adding a number to each man's record. They already re-deive a number for their tuberculosis and v.d. tests. There isn't even room on the forms for another number! So this is what we do with intestinal disease, malaria, and so forth: if a man is looking jaundiced, or woozy, we haul him out of line and give him a special going over.

The ones who turn up with a small suspicious spot on one of their lungs, or something else disqualifying, we ship 'em right back. Oh, it's tough all right. I'll pick up a slight heart murmur, and say, "Sorry, fella." He'll look at me like he doesn't believe me. "But I'm big and strong. I work hard. Look at me." And he flexes his muscles. He is big and strong, too. But after a while you learn to be hard. You treat them all alike. They'll tell you stories about their six kids that would break your heart. It doesn't make any difference.

Now, as far as their learning new ideas about health in the U.S. is concerned. It seems very reasonable. Most of the ones coming in for the first time have never seen a doctor in their lives. You can tell when you try to interview them. You try to take a medical history. Have you ever had this and that. They'll look at you as if to say, "What do you want to know that for?" Why, they don't even know how to breathe through their mouth when you're checking their lungs. It's all brand new to them.

When you compare them with the old-timers -- the ones who have been up here may be half a dozen times before. These guys are making a shambles of the insurance program. They are abusing it something terrible, taking advantage of it. I see something

of the sort among the men who are going through here on their way back to Mexico. They'll come in here and say, "Oh, I've got such a terrible cold. How about some aspirin," and this and that. They just want to load up on free medicine to take back home with them. I tell them there are plenty of drug stores in Mexicali, and I even tell them the names and addresses of pharmacists in town if they are really interested. We're not running a clinic here. Of course, if somebody lays his scalp open here at the center, I'll sew him up.

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I've been with this program 19 months, plus 4 months orientation. I will complete my tour of duty in two weeks, and then I'll get out of this monkey suit so fast it will make your head swim. And will I have fun thumbing my nose at my draft board as I set up my clinic. I'll still be in the reserves, but you'll never see me in one of these things again. Some of the young doctors buy their equipment and everything before they go in, and lose their shirts, because they have to sell it at a loss. I didn't make that mistake. My replacement will be another young fellow, I suppose, although temporarily they are sending out a colonel-- a career ~~xxx~~ public health service man -- from El Paso. I told them I was doing the work of a colonel, and I guess they finally believed me!

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See Dr. Adami at the County TB San in Holtville. He's seen the valley come and go for many years. No, he doesn't have anything to do with braceros directly, unless it's maybe an emergency case rarely. The Sanitarium is tax-supported, and the taxpayers aren't going to pay for long-term care for a bracero. When one of ~~xx~~ em shows up, he's repatriated. I don't blame them. I'd do the same thing. Do you know how long it takes to clear up the average case in the San?